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ABSTRACT

The American public education system seems to be resistant to curative measures. This book is a journalistic account of Cleveland Heights High School's unsuccessful struggle to achieve excellence and equity. The high school, located in a middle-class suburb of Cleveland, implemented the Model School Project in 1988 to address the persistent failure of its minority students. The data were drawn from 4 years of observation and interviews. The story reveals the destructive organizational, political, social, and racial tensions inherent in public school organization and operation. Despite its estimable goals, ample funding, and grassroots leadership by the teaching staff, the project did not gain educational equity for the school's African-American students, nor did it bring about the desired restructuring of the school. Ironically, the teacher-led campaign to reinvent the school was thwarted by the long-simmering frustrations of the very constituency it sought to better serve. The project's failure is attributed to a "culture of inertia," which is a convergence of the following components: the passive-conservative sociology of the teaching profession; the "revolving door" nature of administrative leadership; centralized school management; militant unionism; institutionalized turf and power disputes; the pervasiveness of "us versus them" thinking; racism, sexism, and classism; intimidation and lack of communication; lack of institutional memory; the political underpinnings of school boards; the dependence of public school financing on the whim and means of local homeowners; the market-driven nature of school curriculum and programs; educational policy formation based on the race, gender, and class biases of dominant constituencies; and limited resources. (Contains 49 references and an index.) (LMI)

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